

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING

March 25, 2010

Farmers' Breakfast - Kelly's Restaurant

Minutes

Meeting was opened by Sally Fitz with a discussion of methods for selling agricultural products: CSA model 3; farm 3-4; other farmers 3; wholesale 3; online 1; farmers' market 2; co-ops (milk) 1.

Issues posed include:

- Product to market vs. product to middle man to market;
- Narrow window – perishable products;
- Buy local campaign – CISA opportunity;
- Word-of-mouth advertising can pose problem, with just one “unhappy customer”;
- Banner in center of town was very successful and non-controversial

Tony Moroulis, representing the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce, expressed their desire to tie in to the agricultural community through co-op advertising, special membership rates, and tourism with a goal of implementation in September of 2010.

Discussion followed regarding a year-round market with various plans posed – weekly, monthly, etc. Question was raised as to who would be in the market – whether they would be Amherst farmers, Amherst area farmers, or farmers outside this geographic area. Currently, the Amherst Farmer's Market only has approximately 25% membership from Amherst farms.

Suggestions for the location of an additional farmers market included Cherry Hill building and Kendrick Park. Money appears to be available at the federal level for a year-round market. Anyone interested in participating was asked to sign in, not as a commitment, but as a possible participant. It was pointed out that there probably would not be enough farmers if we were to restrict it to just Amherst farmers, but perhaps Amherst farmers would be first on the list. Some felt the regional approach would be better, perhaps calling it a Hampshire/Franklin County market.

It was felt that there should be a definition of an Amherst farmer – would it be farmers lining and farming in Amherst; farmers who reside outside of Amherst but farm on Amherst land; farmers who reside in Amherst but farm on land outside of Town?

Another suggestion was to include crafts that incorporated agricultural products – particularly mentioning Christmas trees and other holiday craft items.

The question was raised: what should the Agricultural Commission's goal for the next year be? It was felt that we should try for the connection with the public, letting people know what is available and where it is available, from things like compost, to animal feed to food products, perhaps preparing an Amherst Farmers Guide.

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It was pointed out that reliability in terms of location of any market is an important aspect when dealing with the public. Prospective buyers don't want to have to "track down" the location, week to week. Currently, the Amherst Farmers market is suffering from parking issues, but frequently offers a social opportunity for folks to congregate. It was pointed out that the Pioneer Valley Growers has similar goals to ours.

A status report was given on meetings with the Water Department regarding water and sewer charges for farms. It was reported that "slow moving vehicle" pamphlets have been prepared by the Massachusetts Farm Bureau. It was suggested that these pamphlets could be placed in various locations throughout Town.